

## **CHRISTIANITY TODAY'S CHEAP SHOT AT BIBLICAL WARNING MINISTRIES**

August 28, 2007 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

The August 2007 issue of *Christianity Today* contains a cheap shot aimed at Way of Life Literature in particular and biblical warning ministries in general.

(CT also used Apprising Ministries as an example of its thesis. I am not personally familiar with this ministry and I do not know its writers, but I understand that they are Southern Baptists. I checked out the web site and they warn about such things as the Emerging Church, New Evangelicalism, Harry Potter, Romanism, and the Rick Warren-style Church Growth movement, and the reports appear to be well documented and biblically informed. I do not know wherein we might disagree doctrinally, but I do know that this is powerful stuff from Southern Baptist pens and I pray that their tribe may increase mightily and that plain spoken preaching against sin and error will spread throughout the SBC!)

Titled "Attack Dogs of Christendom," the *Christianity Today* article is hypocritical, shallow and unscholarly, slanderous, biblically and historically wrong, unreasonable, prideful, fearful of strong biblical language, and evidential of CT's own error and spiritual blindness.

### **CONSIDER, FIRST, THE HYPOCRISY OF THE ARTICLE.**

The hypocrisy is obvious on its very head. While *Christianity Today* claims that it is harmful and objectionable for Christians to issue public warnings against other Christians, they do not hesitate to issue a really nasty public warning against their fellow Christians at Apprising Ministries and Way of Life Literature. If *Christianity Today* issues public warnings, that is fine and helpful, but others are not allowed the same privilege. That sounds like hypocrisy to me.

### **THE CT ARTICLE IS SHALLOW AND UNSCHOLARLY.**

The quotes they pulled from Way of Life articles in their attempt to present the ministry as an extreme, borderline cultic one were removed entirely from the context of the extensive and substantive doctrinal arguments that surround them and from the serious research that goes into the reports. Unlike *Christianity Today's* shallow, unscholarly approach to fundamentalists, I actually read the books and articles of New Evangelicals on a regular basis and attend their meetings and conferences in various parts of the world in order to understand them properly and to know what I am writing about.

Let me give an example of the incredible shallowness of the CT report. They wrote, "Often these sites seem convinced that every translation of the Bible done after the King James Version is a step toward apostasy." With that one misguided statement they dismiss all of the substantive

warnings we have given about the modern versions and the decades of serious research into the Bible version-text issue that stands behind the warnings. Just three of our recent books on that subject total 1,490 pages. I have researched this issue for 25 years, have built a large personal library and read more than 600 books and pamphlets and 2,000 articles on the topic, have done research at places such as the British Library and the libraries at Cambridge and Oxford and Trinity in Dublin, and on-site investigation into this issue in many parts of the world, including Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Slovakia, Italy, and various countries in Asia. To dismiss this type of research so off-handedly and to mischaracterize it so thoroughly is shallow scholarship of a childish level. And this is from a magazine that prides itself in being intellectual and fair.

While we are discussing the unscholarly nature of the CT report, it would be proper to mention that a quote they allege to be from a Way of Life article is nonexistent. The CT article states the following, “Then there is Pat Robertson, ‘one of the greatest deceivers in the church today’ ...” This quote is presented as something they found in a Way of Life article and is supposed to represent our position on Robertson. I was surprised by the quote, since I know that I don’t consider Pat Roberson one of the greatest deceivers, and further I don’t use the term “church” singular after that universal fashion. (When writing about churches in general I use the plural form.) I thought perhaps that CT had found an article at the Way of Life web site that was written by someone else, but I did a search of all of the articles posted at our web site and there is no such quote. I have no idea where they got it, but we certainly never wrote it and it misrepresents our position.

### **THE CT ARTICLE IS ALSO SLANDEROUS.**

The charges made against Way of Life are so untrue and seemingly vicious that they could be characterized as slanderous. CT lumps Way of Life in with websites that are “drenched in sarcasm and animosity.” In fact, I do not write in a sarcastic vein, and any sarcasm that appears anywhere in my writings is exceedingly rare. I have a suspicion that there is more sarcasm in articles published by CT than those by Way of Life.

And though my reports could certainly be characterized as forceful and dogmatic, they are not drenched with animosity. My objective always is to be courteous, and hundreds of readers have written to thank me for the gracious attitude of my reports and hundreds of church members have told me the same thing in regard to my preaching.

Further, CT says the reports “are not reasoned or modestly couched.” In fact, the reports are nothing if they are not reasoned, even if CT doesn’t agree with the reasoning, and the criticism of other ministries is indeed modestly couched. Though we are only human and we doubtless make mistakes, we go to much effort to be correct and fair in our warnings and we aim to write in a modest manner.

CT even says that Way of Life’s reports “differ little from the coarse vulgarity of cable TV.”

They should be ashamed of publishing such slanders about a sincere Christian ministry.

## **THE CT ARTICLE IS ALSO BIBLICALLY AND HISTORICALLY WRONG.**

To say that a preacher should not warn of error publicly (Ct writes, “Lashing out in public at fellow Christians is objectionable”) flies in the face of Scripture as well as the example of church history. Scripture commands the preacher to reprove and rebuke (2 Tim. 4:2) and to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Paul instructed Titus, “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee” (Titus 2:15), and we do not have to beg CT’s permission to do so. In practically every epistle Paul issued severe warnings against theological error. He warned of Hymenaeus and Alexander’s blasphemy (1 Tim. 1:19-20) and of Phygellus and Hermogenes’ apostasy (2 Tim. 1:15) and of Hymenaeus and Philetus’ profane and vain babblings (2 Tim. 2:16-17) and of Demas’ love of the world (2 Tim. 4:10) and of Alexander the coppersmith’s evil (2 Tim. 4:14) and of the Galatian heretics’ cursed gospel (Gal. 1:6-8) and of the dogs and evil workers operating at Philippi (Phil. 3:1-2) and of the false teachers “whose God is their belly” (Phil. 3:17-19). That’s some pretty strong “attack dog” language!

And the Lord Jesus Christ publicly called the Pharisees, who were respected Jewish religious leaders of that day, hypocrites, children of hell, blind guides, fools and blind, serpents, and a generation of vipers (Matthew 23).

Now, there is some real “attack dog” language for you, *Christianity Today*!

When we come to church history we have a continuous stream of godly but plain spoken and sharp public warnings that have been issued against error and that helped to protect God’s people from the heresies of the day. Martin Luther didn’t keep his disagreement with Rome a private matter; he nailed his scathing anti-heresy thesis to the door of the church and published it in tracts for everyone to see. William Tyndale did not keep his disagreement with the heresies of Rome and the moral compromise of the king of England a private matter. He wrote against them boldly in tracts and books that were distributed throughout the land. Charles Spurgeon didn’t keep quiet during the Downgrade Controversy in the Baptist Union. He dealt plainly with its heresies in his very public paper *The Sword and the Trowel*. The Fundamentalists of the early 20th century did not keep their concerns about theological liberalism a private matter. They lifted up tongue and pen boldly and in a most public manner to warn those who had an ear to hear. James Stewart, a mighty evangelist during the 1940s and 1950s, did not keep quiet about that the compromises of the gospel that were just beginning to bud in evangelical Christianity. He wrote publicly to warn of “Pot-Pourri Evangelism” and “Hollywood Evangelism.” In fact, one of CT’s own editors, Harold Lindsell, took up his pen and published a very public warning about the downgrade of the doctrine of inspiration in well-known schools, and he “belled the cat” by naming the names of the chief culprits (*The Battle for the Bible*, 1976; *The Bible in the Balance*, 1979).

I stand in the footsteps of that worthy and right minority that has publicly defended the faith and warned of error, from the apostle Paul forward, and I am not ashamed of my warnings and I do not apologize for them.

I can testify to the Lord with a clear conscience that in publishing these articles I am trying to be faithful to the God who has called me and to be a help to the people today who need the truth.

The fact that we publish warnings via the Internet changes nothing. If we have the right to publish biblical reproofs via a public sermon or a tract, then we have the right to issue them via the Internet or by any other means available.

*Christianity Today's* position is wrong biblically and historically.

### **THE CT ARTICLE, FURTHER, IS UNREASONABLE.**

If preachers are not allowed to warn of error publicly, then error is free to prosper without rebuttal. If Rome can promote Mary veneration across the Internet but we are not at liberty to refute this heresy just as publicly and in the same forum, then Mariolatry can have free reign.

If New Evangelicals can promote their doctrine and philosophy freely on the Internet, should those who oppose it not be at liberty to refute it just as publicly and in the same forums in which it is promoted, when they are convinced by the Spirit of God that it is wrong?

Understandably, the New Evangelical doesn't like the idea of being the target of a theological warning, but Bible preachers are supposed to be in the business of proclaiming the truth rather than soothing egos.

### **THE CT ARTICLE IS ALSO PRIDEFUL.**

They describe warning ministries as representing "small, but disturbingly visible, fundamentalist Protestant groups." Small is the operative word here. Apart from the fact that fundamental Baptist churches in particular and fundamentalist Bible-believing churches in general number in the many thousands around the world and are sometimes larger than their evangelical counterparts, my point is to expose the CT's subtly-presented philosophy that small is of little consequence, that it is the majority that really counts. That is prideful, and it ignores the fact that the truth has been in the extreme minority in this world since the days of Noah.

Another example of pride is the following statement: "It is easy to laugh at these websites, which feature subheads like 'Mixed Swimming' (dangerous, of course) and 'Bible Guidelines for Clothing.'"

It is both carnal and prideful to laugh at such things. The Bible contains many warnings about nudity and lack of modesty and sexual lust in general, and with society and the churches literally drenched with such things today, there is a great need of reproof.

Further, the evangelical churches and ministries that CT represents once preached against these very things and it was not that long ago. Is it not prideful to laugh about that which one's forefathers cried over?

## **THE CT ARTICLE IS ALSO FEARFUL OF STRONG BIBLICAL LANGUAGE IN PREACHING**

The article makes a lot of the alleged fact that the warning ministries in question use strong language. This is one of the major points of the article, which ends with the words, "By all means criticize fellow Christians if necessary, but do so with grace." (We will ignore the fact that this final statement contradicts what was said earlier in the article about it being objectionable to criticize fellow Christians publicly.)

CT characterizes the language of the warning ministries as ungracious, "vitriolic," "blasts of ire," "angry," "intemperate," "lashing out." As evidence of this they quote Apprising Ministries calling Rick Warren "milquetoast" and Robert Schuller and Norman Vincent Peale "the devil's duo" and Brian McLaren and Joel Osteen "vipers of new evangelicalism" and "whitewashed tombs."

What *Christianity Today* calls ungraceful and "vitriolic," I see as gracious and truthful and exceedingly biblical. We have already quoted some of the rough things that Jesus called the Pharisees and that Paul called the heretics of his day. Their statements were no less "vitriolic" than the things quoted above, and who is going to charge them with lack of grace?

How about Peter and John, who has been called "the apostle of love"? We haven't quoted from them yet. Let's see how vitriolic and intemperate and ungracious they were in their dealings with error. Peter wrote an entire chapter and a half to warn of false teachers in his second epistle, calling their teaching "damnable heresies" (2 Pet. 2:1), their ways "pernicious" (2 Pet. 2:2), their words "feigned" (2 Pet. 2:3), and their future "damnation" that "slumbereth not" (2 Pet. 2:3). He likened them to the "filthy conversation" of Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Pet. 2:6-9) and called them "presumptuous" and "self-willed" (2 Pet. 2:10). He even likened them to "natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed" (2 Pet. 2:12). Peter made a lot more vitriolic-sounding statements about them, too! Just read 2 Peter 2-3.

And as for John, he was no slacker when it came to rebuking false teachers. He called them antichrists and warned of the fact that "they went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:18). He called the liars (1 John 2:22) and seducers (1 John 2:26) and taught the believers to "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). He further warned of the "many deceivers" that are entered into the world (2 John 7) and dogmatically said

that “whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God” (2 John 9). That means that a lot of preachers in these end times do not have God and should be publicly exposed as such. John would certainly expose them if he were here today! John even warned of Diotrefes, a puffed-up preacher (3 John 9-10).

To be consistent with its stand against “ungracious” “vitriolic” speech, CT needs to reject the Bible.

In fact, what we have in the CT article is a common thing. It is common for the object of a biblical reproof to charge the reprover with being “mean” and even “violent” and to mischaracterize reproof as persecution.

### **FINALLY, THIS ARTICLE IRREFUTABLY EXPOSES CT’S OWN ERROR AND SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.**

It is not surprising that *Christianity Today* would despise Way of Life Literature, because we have documented and biblically refuted the New Evangelical error that they represent. With the uninformed, CT might get away with mocking those that warn of New Evangelicalism and insinuating that the latter is merely the figment of some fundamentalist’s rabid imagination. But we know that the term “Neo-evangelical” was actually coined by Harold Ockenga, one-time editor of *Christianity Today* and director on the board of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. In the foreword to Harold Lindsell’s *The Battle for the Bible*, Ockenga recounted the early history of New Evangelicalism and listed its principles:

“Neo-evangelicalism was born in 1948 in connection with a convocation address which I gave in the Civic Auditorium in Pasadena. While reaffirming the theological view of fundamentalism, this address REPUDIATED ITS ECCLESIOLOGY AND ITS SOCIAL THEORY. The ringing call for A REPUDIATION OF SEPARATISM AND THE SUMMONS TO SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT received a hearty response from many evangelicals. The name caught on and spokesmen such as Drs. Harold Lindsell, Carl F.H. Henry, Edward Carnell, and Gleason Archer supported this viewpoint. We had no intention of launching a movement, but found that the emphasis attracted widespread support and exercised great influence. Neo-evangelicalism... DIFFERENT FROM FUNDAMENTALISM IN ITS REPUDIATION OF SEPARATISM and its determination to engage itself in the theological dialogue of the day. it had a new emphasis upon the application of the gospel to the sociological, political, and economic areas of life. Neo-evangelicals emphasized the restatement of Christian theology in accordance with the need of the times, the REENGAGEMENT IN THE THEOLOGICAL DEBATE, THE RECAPTURE OF DENOMINATIONAL LEADERSHIP, AND THE REEXAMINATION OF THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS SUCH AS THE ANTIQUITY OF MAN, THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE FLOOD, GOD’S METHOD OF CREATION, AND OTHERS” (Harold J. Ockenga, foreword to Harold Lindsell’s book *The Battle for the Bible*).

Thus New Evangelicalism was founded in the 1940s by men associated with Billy Graham and *Christianity Today* and it was a public and staunch repudiation of the old biblical fundamentalism with its separatism and dogmatic doctrinal stance. New Evangelicalism determined to put a more positive, intellectual face on Christianity and to allow room for the re-examination of “problems” such as “the antiquity of man, the universality of the blood, and God’s method of creation.” In other words, it would allow room for the heresy of evolution and would not take a stand for the biblical doctrine of creation. In fact, as time passed and the New Evangelical philosophy permeated evangelical Christianity, it became painfully obvious that it

would not stand for much of anything and that it would smile in toleration upon a multitude of heresies and that it represented an almost total breakdown of the biblical doctrine of separation from worldliness and heresy.

Way of Life Literature has carefully documented this unscriptural business in its articles and books (see, for example, the 153-page book *New Evangelicalism: Its History, Characteristics, and Fruit*), so it is no surprise that we are despised by those who are committed to such error.

In the recent hit piece against Way of Life and other warning ministries, *Christianity Today* set itself up in opposition to ministries that are “outraged that fellow Protestants appear to be holding out a welcoming hand to Catholics or Orthodox Christians.” Thus it is more acceptable, in the eyes of CT, to associate with the gross heresies represented by the Roman Catholic Church than it is to warn of the same.

The CT article makes light of ministries that warn about Rick Warren, Robert Schuller, Brian McLaren, Joel Osteen, and others. For those who are informed of the very dangerous and unscriptural doctrines promoted by these men, this is plain evidence of CT’s own error and spiritual blindness.

WARREN teaches that God “won’t ask you about your ... doctrinal views” (*The Purpose Driven Life*, p. 34), and God is “not a boss, but a brother...” (p. 79), and God “warns us over and over not to ... judge each other” (p. 164). SCHULLER teaches that defining sin as rebellion against God is “shallow and insulting to the human being” (Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*, p. 65), that sin is “any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self-esteem” (*Self-Esteem*, p. 14) and that every human being is a child of God (*Self-Esteem*, p. 17). MCLAREN teaches that evangelicals should turn their backs on the old belief that the Bible is the absolute standard for truth and that doctrine is either right or wrong and should adopt a pliable, philosophical position in which “faith is more about a way of life than a system of belief, where being authentically good is more important than being doctrinally right” (from the back cover of McLaren’s “A New Kind of Christian”). OSTEEN, one of the kings of the unscriptural prosperity gospel today, was described by the *St. Petersburg Times* as “unrelentingly positive ... nonjudgmental ... no condemnation ... no damnation” (“God’s Cheerleader,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Nov. 26, 2006).

By implying that it is wrong to warn publicly of such heresies and mocking those who issue the warnings, *Christianity Today* has aligned itself with heresy and has exposed its own deep theological compromise.

## CONCLUSION

Is Way of Life Literature an attack dog? An attack dog presents the image of tearing someone apart and causing them bodily harm, but that has nothing to do with what Way of Life is about. We have not hurt anyone nor have we even wished hurt upon anyone. We are committed to the

precept of Christ, “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

It is not hurtful to anyone to preach the truth in Christian love and to warn of error. The sinner and false teacher might not like the sting of the truth, but if he would repent he would learn to love it!

It is more accurate to say that Way of Life is like a watch dog. We bark at heresy wherever it lifts its destructive head in these evil last days so that God’s people can be warned and beware and can stay on the straight and narrow path.

The New Testament warns that in the last days evil times will come and false teachers and carnal compromise will increase among professing Christians (2 Timothy 3-4), so the need today is for more and not fewer voices of warning.

*Christianity Today* should be a watchdog, but it isn’t. CT should be warning boldly of the late but still popular John Paul II’s Mariolatry and Billy Graham’s great ecumenical compromise and Robert Schuller’s Self-Esteemism and Rick Warren’s judge-notism and Joel Osteen’s prosperityism and McClaren’s nothingism. They should be warning about those who are breaking down the walls of separation between truth and error in these last days. They should be warning plainly of worldliness in the churches and giving godly and practical instruction on how to dress modestly. They are too busy, though, having a good chuckle at those who are doing these things.

But, then again, the magazine’s name is “Christianity Today,” and it is actually an accurate reflection of the apostasy that reigns in Christianity today. Its banner should be, “They shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.”

The reason why this generation of “evangelicals” is so ignorant of the important issues facing God’s people in these end times is because their watchmen are blind and dumb.

“His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber” (Isaiah 56:10).

The same spirit of slumber and dumbness is overcoming many fundamental Baptist preachers. Today’s “young fundamentalists” are on the same road as that taken by *Christianity Today*. Take heed!

I, for one, thank the Lord for many warning ministries and for the plain-spoken preaching that has helped me avoid error through these last 34 years since I have been saved, and I pray that God will use me in the same capacity until He takes me home.

Ruuuuf!



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